

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (Currently Amended) A virtual switch for a network of distribution switches, core switches, and satellite switches, the virtual switch comprising:

a master distribution switch chassis comprising:

a first plurality of linecards; and

a master supervisor card for controlling the first plurality of linecards

a first master distribution switch port configured for communication with the slave chassis over a virtual switch link;

a second master distribution switch port configured to receive management instructions from a satellite switch; and

a third master distribution switch port configured to send configuration and management instructions to the core switches; and

a slave distribution switch chassis under the control of the master supervisor card, the slave chassis comprising:

a second plurality of linecards; ~~and~~

a slave supervisor card;

a first master distribution switch port configured for communication with the slave chassis over a virtual switch link;

a second master distribution switch port configured to receive management instructions from a satellite switch; and

a third master distribution switch port configured to send configuration and management instructions to the core switches; and

~~a virtual switch link for communication between the master chassis and the slave chassis.~~

2. (Original) The virtual switch of claim 1, wherein the master chassis and the slave chassis communicate according to a virtual switch link protocol for logically extending a data plane of the master chassis to that of the slave chassis.

3. (Original) The virtual switch of claim 1, wherein the virtual switch link comprises a control virtual switch link and a data virtual switch link.

4. (Original) The virtual switch of claim 1, wherein the virtual switch link comprises a plurality of physical links combined to form a logical link.

5. (Currently Amended) The virtual switch of claim 2, wherein the virtual switch link protocol comprises a packet containing field indicating whether a packet has traversed the virtual switch link.

6. (Original) The virtual switch of claim 2, wherein the virtual switch link is used to synchronize routing tables of the master chassis and the slave chassis.

7. (Original) The virtual switch of claim 3, wherein the control virtual switch link extends an internal Out-of-Band Channel to communicate between the master chassis and the slave chassis.

8. (Original) The virtual switch of claim 3, wherein the data virtual switch link extends an internal chassis data plane to communication between the master chassis and the slave chassis.

9. (Original) The virtual switch of claim 3, wherein the master supervisor communicates with the slave supervisor via inband messaging on the control virtual switch link.

10. (Original) The virtual switch of claim 3, wherein the control virtual switch link is brought on-line first and is used to determine which chassis will be the master chassis.

11. (Original) The virtual switch of claim 3, wherein a single physical link combines the control virtual switch link and the data virtual switch link.

12. (Original) The virtual switch of claim 3, wherein the control virtual switch link and the data virtual switch link are formed from separate physical links.

13. (Cancelled).

14. (Currently Amended) A method of forming a virtual switch from a plurality of physical switches in a network, the method comprising:

configuring a first physical switch as a master switch for controlling the virtual switch;

configuring a second physical switch as a slave switch under the control of the master switch, wherein the first physical switch and the second physical switch are redundant backups acting as distribution switches in a network ;

forming a virtual switch link for communication between the master switch and the slave switch; ~~and~~

causing the master switch and the slave switch to communicate via a virtual switch link protocol; and

causing the master switch and the slave switch to act as a single virtual switch to a satellite switch, wherein the virtual switch is configured to receive instructions regarding management of the network from the satellite switch.[[.]]

15. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 14, wherein the virtual switch link protocol comprises packet containing a source port identifier.

16. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 14, wherein the virtual switch link protocol comprises packet containing a destination port index.

17. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 14, wherein the virtual switch link protocol comprises packet containing source flood information.

18. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 14, wherein the virtual switch link protocol comprises packet containing VLAN information.

19. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 14, wherein the virtual switch link protocol is used by the first and second physical switches to indicate[[s]] whether an access control list should be applied to a frame.

20. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 14, wherein the virtual switch link protocol is used by the first and second physical switches to indicate[[s]] whether a QoS designation should be applied to a frame.

21. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 14, wherein the virtual switch link protocol is used by the first and second physical switches to indicate[[s]] whether a frame is a MAC notification frame.

22. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 14, wherein the virtual switch link protocol includes packet containing data plane priority information for a frame.

23. (Original) The method of claim 14, further comprising extending a first data plane of the master switch to include a second data plane of the slave switch according to communication between the master switch and the slave switch via the virtual switch link protocol.

24. (Original) The method of claim 14, further comprising forming the virtual switch link from a plurality of physical links acting as a single logical link.

25. (Original) The method of claim 14, further comprising forming the virtual switch link to include a data virtual switch link and a control virtual switch link.

26. (Original) The method of claim 14, further comprising:
 updating layer 2 forwarding tables in the master chassis;
 updating layer 2 forwarding tables in the slave chassis; and
 correcting inconsistencies between the layer 2 forwarding tables in the master chassis and the layer 2 forwarding tables in the slave chassis.

27. (Original) The method of claim 25, wherein step of forming the virtual switch link comprises combining the data virtual switch link and the control virtual switch link on a single physical link.

28. (Original) The method of claim 25, further comprising:
 updating layer 2 forwarding tables in the master chassis;
 updating layer 2 forwarding tables in the slave chassis; and
 correcting inconsistencies between the layer 2 forwarding tables in the master chassis and the layer 2 forwarding tables in the slave chassis according to frames transmitted on the data virtual switch link.

29. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 28, wherein the virtual switch is further configured to send management and/or configuration instructions to core switches in the network in response to instructions received from the satellite switch. ~~wherein the frames are MAC notification frames.~~

30. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for forming a virtual switch from a plurality of physical switches in a distribution layer or a core layer of a network, the apparatus comprising:

- means for configuring a first physical switch as a master switch for controlling the virtual switch;
- means for configuring a second physical switch as a slave switch under the control of the master switch, wherein the first physical switch and the second physical switch are redundant backups acting as distribution switches in a network ;
- means for forming a virtual switch link for communication between the master switch and the slave switch; ~~and~~
- means for causing the master switch and the slave switch to communicate via a virtual switch link protocol; and
- means for causing the master switch and the slave switch to act as a single virtual switch to a satellite switch, wherein the virtual switch is configured to receive instructions regarding management of the network from the satellite switch.

31. (Currently Amended) A computer program encoded with a computer program for embodied ~~in a machine-readable medium, the computer program containing instructions for controlling a plurality of physical switches of a network to perform the following steps:~~

- configuring a first physical switch as a master switch for controlling the virtual switch;
- configuring a second physical switch as a slave switch under the control of the master switch, wherein the first physical switch and the second physical switch are redundant backups acting as distribution switches in a network ;
- forming a virtual switch link for communication between the master switch and the slave switch; ~~and~~
- causing the master switch and the slave switch to communicate via a virtual switch link protocol; and
- causing the master switch and the slave switch to act as a single virtual switch to a satellite switch, wherein the virtual switch is configured to receive instructions regarding management of the network from the satellite switch.

32. (Currently Amended) The computer program of claim 31, wherein the computer program is further for further comprising instructions for controlling a plurality of physical switches of a network to logically extend a data plane of the master switch to that of the slave switch.

33. (Withdrawn) A method of initializing a virtual network device, comprising:

performing a handshake sequence between a first chassis and a second chassis, the first chassis and the second chassis being redundant network devices of a data network; and determining whether the first chassis or the second chassis will be a master chassis for controlling a virtual network device comprising the first chassis and the second chassis.

34. (Withdrawn) The method of claim 33, wherein the handshake sequence includes exchanging information selected from the group consisting of a hardware version of a supervisor; a chassis identifier; a chassis number; a software version of each supervisor in a chassis; hardware values for a slot in a chassis; and a slot/port of a remote endpoint for a particular link between the first chassis and the second chassis.

35. (Withdrawn) The method of claim 33, further comprising the step of forming a control virtual switch link of the virtual network device according to information exchanged during the handshake sequence.

36. (Withdrawn) The method of claim 35, further comprising the step of ascertaining whether a physical link that will become a data virtual switch link is connected to both the first chassis and the second chassis.

37. (Withdrawn) The method of claim 36, further comprising the step of forming a data virtual switch link of the virtual network device if the ascertaining step indicated that the physical link was connected to both the first chassis and the second chassis.